

Fitchburg Central Steam Plant Cleanup Project Community Relations Plan – Revised 3/15/2010

Cooperative Agreement Number: BF-97177501-0

Overview

The purpose of this Community Relations Plan (CRP) is to outline the strategy for public participation and address concerns related to this project. Cleanup activities at the Central Steam Plant, which is located at 465 Westminster Street, may potentially impact the neighborhood, the Steam Line Trail and the Steam Line Park. The city is committed to providing accurate, current, and readily accessible information on the project for residents, government officials and the general public.

The involvement of residents is critically important to the success of the cleanup. The primary focus of the CRP is to maximize input from residents living near the steam plant, as well as the general public who will use the Steam Line Trail and Park as a destination point. Community partners and residents have provided knowledge of the site's history, which has been helpful in preparing for the cleanup. The informal monitoring of the site by neighborhood residents, who use the trail for walking, has been very helpful to the city as well. Continued community involvement will be essential to any discussions about petroleum clean up and disposition of the central steam plant building.

Spokespersons and Information Repository

The spokespersons for this project is Mary McCaffrey, Project Manager, for the petroleum clean up and Larry Casassa, Deputy Director of the Community Development Office, who is overseeing the boarding and securing of the Central Steam Plant building.

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The information repository is also located at the city office located at the above address. All public meetings will be held in the Veterans Room, First Floor, Fitchburg City Hall, unless otherwise posted.

Site Location

The Central Steam Plant is located in West Fitchburg at 465 Westminster Street and holds a prominent spot near the entrance to the Steam Line Trail which, when completed, the trail will run from Westminster to Leominster Massachusetts.

The City of Fitchburg acquired approximately 6 acres of land, including the 2 acres on which the Central Steam Plant sits. It is on these 2 acres where the Brownfields cleanup will take place. In addition to the 6 acres acquired via bankruptcy, the City acquired a linear 1.25 parcel connecting the 6 acres via eminent domain, in order to develop the Steam Line Park.

Site History

Fitchburg had a manufacturing based economy dating back to the 19th Century with the City's historic emphasis on mill industries situated along the Nashua River. Prominent mill owners harnessed the river's hydropower by building a series of dams to retain water in mill ponds, which was then transported through wooden penstocks and turbines to power the mill equipment. As the need for water grew, the plant owners built the Central Steam Plant in 1928, to provide steam-generated power to the 13 paper mills located along the banks of the Nashua River. Eventually it became more cost effective to purchase power from the electric companies to operate the mills. The steam plant became a co-generation facility, providing both steam and electricity to the mills. Coal, oil and gas have been used at the site.

In the 1970s, the City built the adjacent West Fitchburg Sewage Treatment Plant to comply with environmental regulations. The treatment plant helped to clean the river of dye used to color the paper made at the mills.

In the 1990s, the Central Steam Plant closed, along with most of the paper mills. Two mills remain active. They are: Newark America and Crocker Technical Paper. A third mill, Munksjo Paper, was recently closed. All are within a mile of the Central Steam Plant.

Today, the Nashua River is much cleaner and more attractive as a recreational destination. The city has begun to redevelop the site with the newly created ½ mile walking/biking Steam Line Trail and Park. Environmental clean up at the facility is the next step is making the project site re-useable. (Ralph S. Baker, Ph.D., Nashua River Watershed Association & Fitchburg Greenway Committee)

Nature of Threat to Public Health and Environment

Clean up of the Central Steam Plant will make the Steam Line Trail/Park much more appealing and environmentally safe for users. Trail and park users will be able to recreate in an area free of petroleum and hazardous substances, which pose a threat to human health. The city has taken steps to brick up the first floor windows and secure all doors at the plant.

Previous assessment efforts have shown that the principal hazards at the site are related to the presence of two underground storage tanks, non-friable and asbestos-containing materials within the steam plant building, and possible contamination of the ground water

around the USTs. Estimates to clean up petroleum contaminated soils at the 420,000 UST and the 110,000 UST came in over budget. Therefore, the scope of work has been reduced to cleaning up the area near the 110,000 UST, which has reportable conditions. Furthermore, cost estimates to clean the steam plant building of asbestos and other hazardous materials came in at \$800,000. EPA awarded \$50,500 in hazardous substance funds to be matched with CDBG funds at \$10,100. As a result of the limited funding, specifications are being developed to have a contractor board and secure the building. A cost estimate for this work has not been received.

Prior releases included:

*In 1996 a release of Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB) containing oil was reported when stained soils were observed in the vicinity of a transformer substation. In response to the oil release, the bank of transformers and approximately eight cubic yards of underlying soil was removed for off-site disposal.

*In 1999 a release of approximately 100 gallons of No. 6 fuel oil was reported from the overfilling of the 25,000 Aboveground Storage Tank (AST) in the western portion of the site. According to the Phase I report, oil was released to a berm beneath the AST and a catch basin/storm drain system that discharges to the adjacent Nashua River. Immediate Response Action activities were conducted: use of absorbent materials in the release area and the river, recovery of spilled oil by pumping the storm water drain and catch basin, and removal of up to 10 cubic yards of impacted soil.

*In 2000 an ongoing release of several thousand gallons of No. 6 fuel oil was reported to be occurring as a result of a ruptured pipe in an oil preheating apparatus located inside the building. The oil had flowed from the drainage pits below the leaking pipe into the storm drains and eventually into the Nashua River. According to the Phase I report, response actions were conducted by the previous site owner under the direction of the EPA and the U.S. Coast Guard, including the removal of pockets of free oil along the edges of the impacted river area.

*In 2001 a petroleum release was reported based on an area of stained soils observed during re-grading activities in a driveway area east of the 110,000-gallon fuel oil UST. A Response Action Outcome (RAO) report was submitted to DEP in August 2002. Soil sampling and testing were done.

Several reports are on file with the Department of Environmental Protection regarding this site, including: 2001 IRA Plan completed by Earth Tech; Phase II Assessment Report completed by Earth Tech in 2002; Phase I Report completed by Roux Associates in 2003.

Community Profile

The City of Fitchburg is 28.1 square miles located in north central Massachusetts. It has an average of 1,391.5 persons per square mile. Nationally, Fitchburg is a Community Development Block Grant Entitlement Community and also serves as the lead city in the Fitchburg-Leominster HOME Consortium from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Fitchburg has thirteen Economic Opportunity Areas. Fitchburg was

designated as an Economic Target Area in 1994 and qualified as such under 402 CMR – the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council – according to income, unemployment and other economic characteristics.

According to 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census figures, Fitchburg's population decreased by 10% from 43,560 to 39,102. Recent 2007 Census Bureau estimates show a slight increase in population to 40,050, although still an 8% loss of population compared to 1990 figures. In 2000 Fitchburg had a minority population of 25% comprised of 15% Hispanic or Latino, 3.6% Black and 4.3% Asian. Over 40% of students enrolled at Fitchburg Public Schools were members of the minority community.

2000 Census data shows the per capita income in Fitchburg of \$17,256 is less than 80% of the national average and only 67% of the state average per capita income. Fitchburg's median family income varies widely throughout the City. According to 1999 figures, the City as a whole had a median family income of \$43,291.

Fitchburg has a high percentage of families living below the poverty level, 12.1%. This is about 31% higher than the national average of 9.2% and 80% above the state level of 6.7%.

The Central Steam Plant is located in Census Tract 7103 with a density of 5,809 people per square mile. Census Tract 7103 has a population of 2,876 and a median income of \$46,250. The minority population in this Census Tract is 13% with 2.3% Black and 3.2% Asian. The Central Steam Plant is located in one of Fitchburg's Economic Opportunity Areas.

Chronology of Community Involvement

- * April 2004 – A charrette was held on the cleanup and potential use of the Nashua River. The North Nashua River Master Plan was developed as a result of the charrette.
- * March 1, 2005 – The Board of Park Commissioners accepted the steamline as park property.
- * September 2006 – Ribbon-cutting ceremony was held for the steamline walking/biking trail. It is approximately ½ mile in length. When it is completed it will run from Westminster to Leominster Massachusetts.
- * March 22, 2008 – A meeting with Fitchburg Greenways Committee and city representatives was held to discuss the history of the steam plant followed by a walk-through of the plant.
- * August 21, 2008 – Pre-award meeting held to discuss scope of work and potential re-use of Central Steam Plant. Meeting notice was published and sent to the audiences listed in the EPA grant application.
- * Follow-up meeting with Fitchburg Greenway Committee to be held – date not yet determined. The Committee meets monthly.

- *September 2008 – A QAPP was submitted by VHB under the Redevelopment Authority EPA Assessment Grant
- *July 2009 – MCP Phase I Report/EPA Phase II Report was submitted under the Redevelopment Authority EPA Assessment Grant
- * December 2009 – Developed revised ABCA and Remediation Plan.
- * January 2010 – Received DCAM approval to use VHB consulting services to oversee the petroleum clean up.
- * February 2010 – Entered into a contract with VHB Environmental Firm
- * March/April 2010 – Specifications will be developed for the boarding and securing of the Central Steam Plant Building and specifications for the Petroleum Clean up Project. A consultant on retainer with the City is writing the specifications for the board and secure activity.
- * April 2010 – Will conduct 30 day review of ABCA for petroleum clean up, and hold a public hearing before the Conservation Commission on this scope of work.
- * May 2010 – Put petroleum cleanup specifications out to bid.
- * June 2010 – Put board and secure specifications out to bid.
- * July 2010 – Commence work to remove petroleum contaminated soils.
- * July 2010 – Commence work to board and secure the Central Steam Plant Building.

Key Community Concerns

At the pre-award meeting held on August 21, 2008, residents were concerned about preserving the steam plant for its historical significance in the community. The steam plant played a major role in sustaining Fitchburg's manufacturing-based economy in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Residents are concerned about the cost and extent of the clean up as this will influence whether or not there is an Activity Use Limitation at the site.

The ½ mile walking/biking trail is getting a lot of use. However, there are concerns about security at the steam plant. Even though windows have been boarded up and doors secured, it appears that people are getting inside.

Some of the suggestions for plant re-use include: restaurant/pub, museum, and educational center for environmental issues.

Continued Community Involvement

The city will continue to update residents and other stakeholders on the progress of the cleanup and will solicit input prior to finalizing any major decisions. To that end, the city will:

The City will use the Assessor's property list to send notification to property owners in the Census Tract where the steam plant is located, regarding community meetings to discuss the proposed environmental activities and the potential reuse of the steam plant facility. In addition to using the Assessor's list, non-profit agencies, the local

neighborhood association and the Ward 3 Councilor will be asked to help notify residents living in the Brownfields project neighborhood. Cooperative Partners and other community organizations will be asked to help notify the general public of the proposed activities.

In addition to a mailing, notification will be placed on the city's web page, local TV bulletin board and in the local newspaper regarding a community meeting to discuss proposed environmental activities and the potential reuse of the steam plant facility.

Notification of a community meeting will be sent to property owners and neighborhood residents 2 weeks prior to the meeting date. Notification of a community meeting will be posted on the city's web page, local TV bulletin board and in the local newspaper for the general public 2 weeks prior to the meeting date. Verbal and written comments will be accepted for a period of 30 days from the date of notification. Written comments will receive a written response and will be posted on the city's web page.

Minutes of the community meeting will be taken. These comments, along with comments from the existing Fitchburg Greenways Committee, will be discussed in-house. A presentation on the selected reuse of the steam plant facility will be made at a follow up community meeting. The notification procedure for follow up meetings will be the same as stated above.